

# Major Findings #4

## Family, Peers, School, And Community Can Protect Against Substance Abuse

Research has shown that when risks are reduced in a child's life, the child is less vulnerable to substance abuse and related social and health problems. The more protective factors a child has in his or her life, the more resilient that child will be and the less vulnerable to substance abuse. Whether external or internal, these risk and protective factors form a "web of influence" for each child, an interwoven backdrop that influences each child's life. The web consists of the forces at work in five domains: family, peers, school, community, and society. The evaluation confirms that family, peers, school, and community are all important influences on substance abuse. Efforts to strengthen families (by encouraging communication, appropriate supervision, and positive norm setting) and to strengthen schools as caring communities (to improve school bonding and opportunities for meaningful achievement) increase the protection of youth against substance use.

The study and the new data provided by approximately 10,500 youth in high-risk environments support these interpretations:

- Family connectedness is key in preventing substance use. Where family connectedness is high, family supervision and parental attitudes have a strong influence on which peers young people choose to associate with and also influence the choice to use substances or not. Where family connectedness is high, parental influence can be significant, even when it conflicts with peer attitudes and behaviors. These findings substantiate the critical role parents play directly influencing behavior.
- School is a critical forum for developing healthy adolescent behaviors. When youth are strongly connected to school and are successful in school, they tend to associate with peers who do not use substances and tend not to use themselves.
- Peers have a direct relationship to individual substance use. Youth whose best friends use substances are very likely to use substances themselves. In addition, much of the influence of family, school, and community on individual substance use works through the mediating influence of the selection of peers.
- In the community, neighborhood risk and peer substance use together influence a youth's opportunity and choice to use substances.

